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Blown out of the water

U.S. blasts 2 Libyan gunboats & missile base

By RACHEL FLICK and NILES LATHAM

U.S. warplanes destroyed two Libyan attack ships and wiped out a Libyan missile site yesterday in a major confrontation in the Gulf of Sidra.

The U.S. unleashed its naval power after Libyan forces fired anti-aircraft missiles six times at U.S. warplanes that had crossed Col. Moammar Khadafy's "line of death."

State-controlled Radio Tripoli declared that Libya is now in a "state of war" with the U.S.

It said suicide squads have been dispatched "to hit American targets all over the world."

Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger said the U.S. sustained no casualties or loss of equipment.

Between 50 and 100 Libyans are thought to have been killed.

The U.S. forces held their fire until a sixth Libyan missile was launched at American targets, Weinberger said.

Two high-speed Libyan Combattante patrol boats, each equipped with four Otomat surface-to-surface missiles, were "dead in the water" and sinking last night

with no known survivors.

Weinberger reported that the missile site was "out of action."

Extra security was placed on President Reagan and other key officials, including Navy Secretary John Lehman and members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

U.S. embassies were on the highest state of security alert.

The naval battle group that has been assembled off the coast of Libya since December has been placed on full alert.

The flotilla includes three aircraft carriers and more than 20 missile cruisers, destroyers, frigates and other

warships.

Weinberger and other administration officials vowed to continue operations into the Gulf of Sidra for the duration of the exercise, scheduled to end April 1.

Weinberger also vowed to shoot back if the Libyans attack again.

White House spokesman Larry Speakes said the U.S. does not consider the episode closed.

"We consider all approaching Libyan forces to have hostile intent."

Speakes declared that Libya was "an outlaw regime and up to no good."

He denied the U.S. had attempted to provoke the Libyans.

"We were there on a peaceful exercise ... to transit in international water," he said.

Senior White House officials admitted that Reagan had approved a plan last December to escalate military pressure on Khadafy in response to Libyan-sponsored terrorist attacks on the Rome and Vienna airports.

The success of yesterday's operation was made possible by data collected by Naval Intelligence and the National Security Agency.

U.S. spy planes have pinpointed precise locations of Soviet made SAM-5 missile batteries.

Intelligence agencies were also able to break Libyan communications codes.

Here's how yesterday's battle unfolded.

7:52 a.m. New York time: Two U.S. warplanes from the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Saratoga entered the

disputed Gulf of Sidra, which Libya claims as its territorial waters but the U.S. claims is international waters.

Two long-range Soviet made SA-5 surface-to-air-missiles were fired from Syrte on the northern coast of Libya at US aircraft, the White House said, but the missiles ran out of fuel before reaching their targets.

12:45 p.m.: Libyans fired two more SA-5's and an SA-2 at the fleet and attacked again at 1:14 pm: with one more SA-5.

2:00 p.m.: U.S. A-6 aircraft based on the aircraft carrier U.S.S. America fired two Harpoon anti-ship missiles at a Libyan high-speed missile patrol approaching U.S. naval vessels near near the 32/30 North line.

The ship normally carries a crew of 27.

U.S. forces south of the 32/30 line responded to the missile attacks by launching two HARM high-speed anti-radiation missiles at the SA-5 site at Syrte.

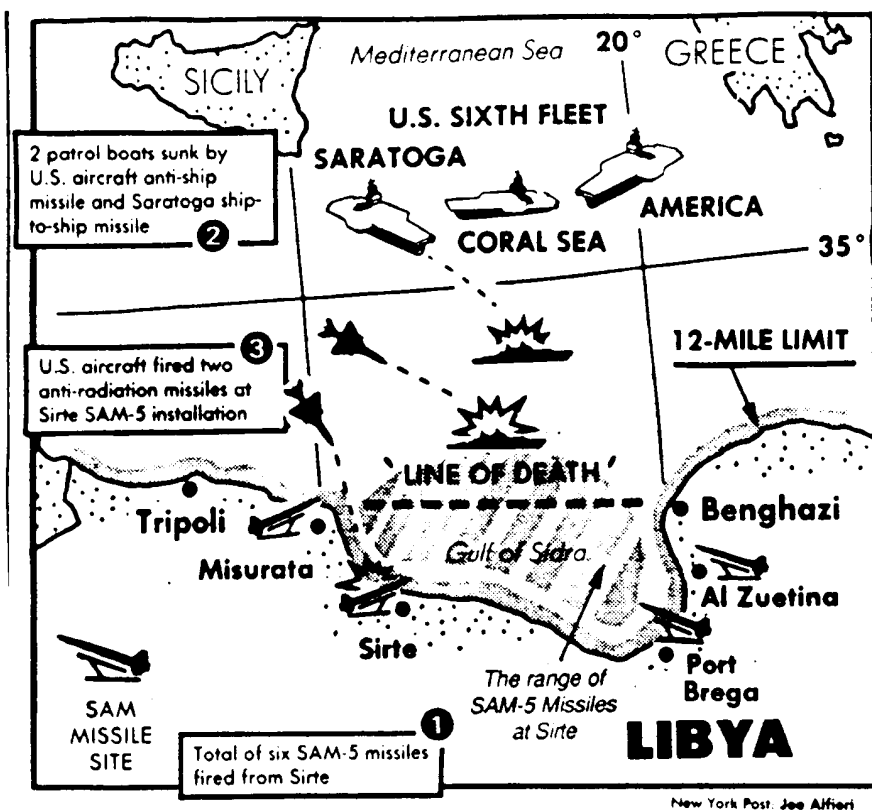
At that time, the SA-5 complex was attempting to "engage our aircraft," Speakes said.

The sophisticated U.S. missiles were fired from the Saratoga and they honed in on radar activity at the Syrte site.

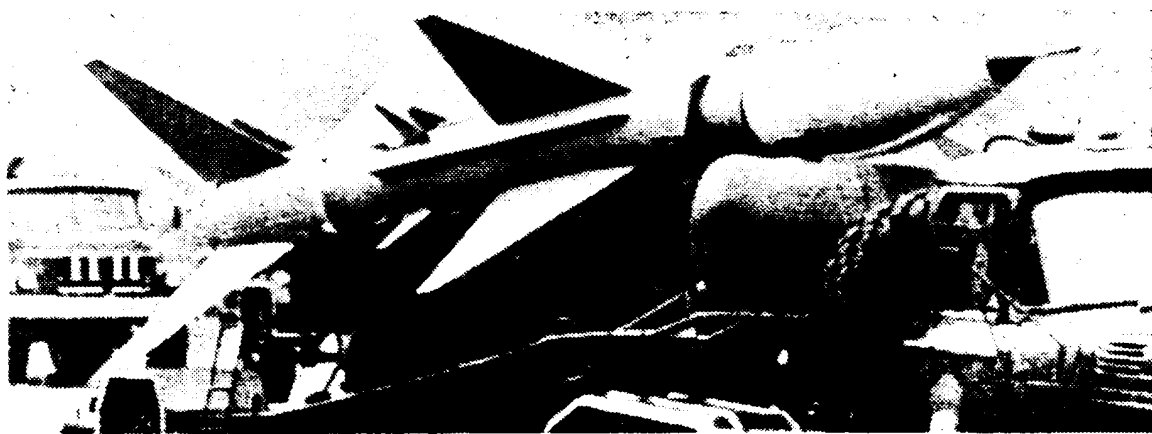
The SAM-5 sites were built with the help of Soviet and East German technicians and it was not known last night whether there were any Soviet casualties.

4:19 p.m.: Another Combattante came out of the Benghazi area and "we hit it too," Weinberger said.

Continued



Map pinpoints yesterday's drama in which the U.S. destroyed two Libyan warships and a missile base.



Libya yesterday fired Soviet-made surface-to-air missiles (above) at U.S. warplanes. U.S. retaliated (below) by sinking Libyan PT boats with harpoon missiles.

